

BELMONT VISION 21 IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

Minutes, September 24, 2009

Present: Kevin Heine, Bruce MacDonald, Sara Oaklander, Jennifer Page, Paul Solomon

Absent: Tim Bowman, Jonathan Mascia, Sara Masucci

Guests: Jay Szklut, Planning and Economic Development Manager for the Town

- **Convening the Meeting:** A quorum being present, Acting Chair Paul Solomon opened the meeting at 7:06 p.m.
- **Minutes from September 14, 2009** were passed unanimously. Paul will forward to Town Hall for posting.
- **Welcoming new members:** Paul Solomon welcomed our new members, Kevin Heine and Bruce McDonald, who have now been officially appointed as members of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee by the Board of Selectmen. Congratulations and welcome to you both!
- **Discussion with Jay Szklut, Planning and Economic Development Manager for Belmont**

The main business of the meeting occurred in discussion with Jay Szklut. The previous week, in conversation, Jay had proposed to Paul a role for the Vision Committee in the development of the Comprehensive Plan; Paul urged him to join us for a discussion about the following:

 - 3 the role of Jay in the Vision Committee;
 - 3 the role of the Vision Committee in the development of the Comprehensive Plan;
 - 3 ideas about the financial future of the Town and our proposed forums.

4.1 The role of Jay Szklut in the Vision Committee

Officially, Jay is a non-voting member of the Committee. His many other obligations result in his being unable to join us regularly. (But he should remain on our mailing list.) Jay proposed that both the Committee and Jay would benefit from serving as a “sounding board” for one another.

For example, the Committee might have turned to Jay for background before writing our letter to the editor regarding the demolition of the Rectory; Jay had useful background information. He also questioned our blanket adoption of the value of preserving old buildings. He believes that some, but not all, old buildings reflect the Town’s history (e.g. what about houses built in the ‘50’s?); only some have historic or architectural significance. In other words, the Committee might want to develop criteria that would help the Town discern the appropriateness of preserving particular buildings by helping to define historic meaning and context. We agreed in general to use Jay as a sounding board and for background on this and other matters; and we

will take under advisement the challenge of developing guidelines for the preservation of old (possibly “historic”) structures.

Reciprocally, Jay would like to use the Vision Committee as a sounding board to test ideas regarding planning, development and zoning, in a setting that is not politicized. Certainly the Committee has a record of serving other town officials in this way (e.g. Paul Solomon as Selectman; Roger Colton in an early draft of a plan for the Our Lady property; the ConCom in a draft of their proposed by-law.) We agreed that we would welcome the opportunity to work with Jay in this manner.

4.2 The role of the Vision Committee in the Comprehensive Plan

Jay explained that Towns which expect to develop a Comprehensive or Master Plan often start by developing and adopting a Vision statement – a broad statement of what they hope the town will become. Only after the Vision is adopted and has been developed with objectives for implementation, does the Town embark on developing a Comprehensive Plan that aims to implement the Vision. Thus, in Belmont, the Vision should inform the Master plan, and the role of the Vision Implementation Committee should be significant contributing to the effort.

Jay sees the central theme of the Vision as that of being a “sustainable community” – socially, economically, and environmentally. This implies energy-reduction in the broadest sense. How is a “town of homes” sustainable? Since we seem to be adopting the notion of Belmont as a “town of villages,” we must ask, What is a 21st century village? It might include a more intense use of space and more commercial development, both of which lead toward sustainability. We might promote bikeways and pathways near housing.

Realistically speaking, the Town needs greater business development and needs a broader “town-wide” orientation. There is a strong tendency for residents of individual neighborhoods, lacking a town-wide orientation, to resist change, often at the expense of the benefit to the town as a whole. The Vision Committee might be very helpful in surfacing this problem and finding ways to advocate for a town-wide perspective.

An interesting recent proposal suggested the concept of a “green belt” around Belmont, that would tie together – connect -- the different parts of town, with bikeways and walkways for pedestrians and bicyclists; this concept would be a partial remedy to the lack of funding available for a town bus or van with a town-wide circular route. It would bring the “hill” closer to the rest of town; it would connect East Belmont with green space. The challenge is that the green spaces in Belmont are “owned” (i.e. “controlled”) by several disparate entities: the Conservation Commission, the McLean Management Committee, the Recreation Commission – to name a few. The VIC could probably be helpful in bringing together these groups.

Jay also encouraged us to have one member of the Vision Committee on each of the task forces, to ensure that this message of sustainability and town-wide effort be

articulated. It was agreed that we have enough members (8) to “cover” the six task forces. The task forces (with VIC volunteers names in parentheses) are Public Facilities/Finance (Tim); Open Space and Greenbelt Corridors (Kevin); Housing (Paul); Transportation/Energy (Jennifer); Commercial Development (Jonathan, Sara O.); Historic Preservation (Bruce).

4.3 Financial future of the Town and VIC proposed forums

Jay felt that the Public Facilities/ Finance Working Group is key to the Town’s survival and supported the VIC intention to provide some public educational forums on the Town’s financial issues. He urged that the Working Group and our forums ask the question: Is there a better way to think about financing capital projects?

Additionally, we need a long-term maintenance and capital projects plan. He asked, What are the implications of a new substation for the Electric Light Department? And what is the “best” solution for the Purecoat property? (Should the Town buy and annex it to the high school, or should we encourage the property for light-industrial use, to bring in income?)

4 Climate Action Plan/ Adoption by Board of Selectmen

Paul Solomon reported on the Board of Selectmen’s meeting September 21 in which Sustainable Belmont presented the Climate Action Plan. The Selectmen showed interest with a generally positive response, but offered several amendments to the proposed resolution for adoption. Selectmen Firenze asked for a delay on the vote until after he could see the full revised text of the resolution. The vote will be held at their meeting of October 5.

- 4 **6. Next meeting: October 5.** Depending on the Selectmen’s agenda, the VIC may be able to attend the Selectmen’s meeting to show support for the adoption of the Climate Action Plan, and then move to a different room to continue our own work. Paul Solomon will monitor this and let us know when and where we will meet.

Primary agenda items for next meeting: our role in the Comprehensive Planning process (how do we advocate for the Vision?), what is meant by sustainability; how we can further help Jay in the planning process. Other high priority items: move forward in planning our forums and in orientation for new members.

- 8 **Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Page
Secretary Pro Tempore